

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ADP-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

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R 180915 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4332

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USMISSION NATO

USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VALLETTA 0994

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MT, IT

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH NATIONALIST DEPUTY FELICE

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REF: VALLETTA 0984

1. SUMMARY: IN CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR U. S., NATIONALIST PARTY DEPUTY FELICE COVERED FOLLOWING SUBJECTS: MINTOFF' S INTENTIONS ON AMENDING CONSTITUTION; PROSPECTIVE ANTI- AMERICAN CAMPAIGN BY MALTA LABOR PARTY; FINANCING OF NEWSPAPER " MEDITERRANEAN NEWS"; LEADERSHIP CRISIS IN NATIONALIST PARTY; AND ITALO-MALTESE RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. NATIONALIST PARTY DEPUTY MARIO FELICE, ON EVE OF TRIP TO NORFOLK FOR ATA MEETING AND VISIT TO WASHINGTON, CALLED ON AMBASSADOR MAY 16. FOLLOWING POINTS WERE RAISED.
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3. FELICE CLAIMED THAT MALTA IN FAIRLY NEAR TERM FUTURE MAY BE FACED WITH CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS. HE SAYS THAT CROWN ADVOCATE GENERAL AT PRIME MINISTER'S INSTRUCTION HAS DRAFTED AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD UNDER CONSTITUTION REQUIRE TWO- THIRDS MAJORITY FOR PASSAGE. AMENDMENTS WOULD PROVIDE FOR SINGLE MEMBER DISTRICTS FOR ELECTION OF PARLIAMENT (1) (WHICH FELICE SAYS WOULD THEN BE GERRYMANDERED TO PROVIDE SURE LABOR VICTORY) AND (2) WOULD CHANGE MALTA INTO REPUBLIC WITH PUPPET PRESIDENT. FELICE ASSERTS THAT MINTOFF'S MEETING WITH GOVERNOR GENERAL LAST WEEK WAS TO PROVIDE THIS INFORMATION TO LATTER, AND ENSURE THAT HE WOULD ASSENT TO PASSAGE OF AMENDMENTS BY SIMPLE MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT.

4. FELICE CLAIMED THAT GOVERNOR GENERAL IS TOTALLY SUBMISSIVE TO PRIME MINISTER AND WILL GO ALONG WITH THIS EXTRA- CONSTITUTIONAL PROCEDURE. WHEN ASKED WHY GOVERNOR GENERAL WOULD CAP HIS CAREER WITH SUCH ABYSMAL AND ILLEGAL SURRENDER, FELICE SAID MINTOFF WOULD PROBABLY CONSIDER ESTABLISHING GOVERNOR GENERAL AS PRESIDENT. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY FOR THIS OFFICE WOULD BE PRESENT SPEAKER OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ATTARD BEZZINA.

5. WHEN ASKED IF QUESTIONS OF LOWERING VOTING AGE TO 18, AND ABOLITION OF OFFICE OF VICE PRESIDENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL COURT WERE ALSO INCLUDED IN PROPOSED AMENDMENTS, FELICE DISMISSED THESE AS BEING RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT AND NOT INCLUDED.

6. FELICE ADDED THAT MINTOFF HAD WRITTEN TO NATIONALIST LEADER BORG OLIVIER ASKING IN GENERAL TERMS FOR HIS SUPPORT IN EFFECTING AMENDMENTS TO CONSTITUTION. NATIONALIST PARTY EXECUTIVE AUTHORIZED BORG OLIVIER TO REPLY NEGATIVELY BUT BORG OLIVIER IS STILL CARRYING THIS REPLY IN HIS POCKET.

7. FELICE THEN EMBARKED ON RATHER UNHAPPY ACCOUNT OF SITUATION WITHIN NATIONALIST PARTY. BASICALLY DILEMMA IS THAT BOTH PARTY LEADER BORG OLIVIER AND DEPUTY LEADER TABONE ARE COMPLETELY INEFFECTIVE, BUT YOUNGER PARTY MEMBERS FEEL THAT IT WOULD BE PUBLIC DISASTER TO REMOVE THEM. BORG OLIVIER'S PROBLEM IS THAT HE SIMPLY IS INACTIVE AND PROVIDES NO LEADERSHIP. TABONE, ON OTHER HAND, IS NOT VERY INTELLIGENT AND IS CONSTANTLY GETTING CONFIDENTIAL

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IN TROUBLE BY MAKING PUBLIC STATEMENTS WHICH LEAVE HIM OPEN TO DEVASTATING REPLIES BY PRIME MINISTER.

8. FELICE ALSO CLAIMS THAT LABOR PARTY INFORMANT HAS TOLD HIM THAT MLP WILL BEFORE LONG EMBARK ON ANTI- AMERICAN CAMPAIGN. FELICE SAID THIS WOULD NOT HAPPEN UNTIL AFTER DELIVERY OF U. S. EXCESS EQUIPMENT, SOME OF WHICH IS ENROUTE TO

MALTA FROM GERMANY. (AMBASSADOR DID NOT INFORM FELICE THAT SHIPMENT ENROUTE COMPRISES IN FACT ONLY ABOUT 25 PERCENT OF PROGRAM AND THAT IT MAY BE YEAR OR MORE BEFORE PROGRAM IS COMPLETE.) FELICE ALSO RAISED SUBJECT OF " MEDITERRANEAN NEWS", ENGLISH LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED IN MALTA WHICH HAS TAKEN UNEQUIVOCABLY PRO- ARAB AND CORRESPONDINGLY ANTI- UBPS. SLANT. FELICE SAYS MEDITERRANEAN NEWS RECEIVES SUBSIDY OF DOLS 90,000 PER YEAR FROM QADHAFI, AND THAT VIGOROUSLY ANTI- AMERICAN COLUMNIST ROBERT DEL PRETE IS PSEUDONYM FOR MALTA LABOR PARTY JOURNALIST.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VALLETTA 0994

9. FELICE ALSO COMMENTED ON ITALO- MALTESE RELATIONS. HE AND OTHER NATIONALIST PARTY FIGURES ARE PERSUADED THAT RECENT CHANGE OF ITALIAN AMBASSADORS REFLECTS GOI UNHAPPINESS WITH DEPARTED AMBASSADOR GIGLIOLI FOR BEING TOO PRO- MINTOFF AND HAVING CULTIVATED MINTOFF TO DEGREE THAT HAS ALIENATED TRADITIONALLY PRO- ITALIAN NATIONALIST PARTY.

10. COMMENT: WHILE MUCH OF FELICE' S ATTITUDE MUST BE TAKEN IN CONTEXT OF COMING FROM PROMINENT YOUNGER MEMBER OF OPPOSITION PARTY, HIS CONCERN FOR CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES IS SUBSTANTIATED BY MINTOFF' S PUBLIC REFERENCES TO ANOMALY OF CONSTITUTION WHICH WAS APPROVED ONLY BY SIMPLE MAJORITY EMBODYING

AMENDMENT PROCEDURES WHICH REQUIRE TWO- THIRDS MAJORITY
IN PARLIAMENT, AND IN SOME CASES ADDITIONAL POPULAR
REFERENDUM. WHILE MUCH OF THE PUBLIC DEBATE HAS CENTERED
AROUND VOTING AGE AND CONSTITUTIONAL COURT VICE PRESIDENCY
QUESTIONS, FELICE' S ASSERTIONS WITH REGARD TO ELECTORAL
SYSTEM ARE MORE PLAUSIBLE AS REAL TARGET FOR MINTOFF' S
AIMS. IT WOULD SEEM MORE LIKELY THAT IF HE WISHES TO
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OPEN CRISIS ON THIS SUBJECT, HE WOULD NOT DO IT ON RELATIVELY
LESS IMPORTANT ASPECTS. FELICE BELIEVES THAT MINTOFF WILL
NOT MOVE ON THESE QUESTIONS UNTIL ABOUT SIX MONTHS FROM
NOW.

11. WITH REGARD TO COMMENTS ON NEW ITALIAN AMBASSADOR,
THEY WERE NOT BORNE OUT DURING CONVERSATION ON OCCASION HIS
INITIAL CALL ON AMBASSADOR MAY 17. WHILE MASSA BERNUCCI
INDICATED ITALY NOT PREPARED TO CONTEMPLATE ANY SIGNIFICANT
NEW FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, HE STATED CLEARLY HIS INTENTION OF
TRYING TO DEVELOP PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH MINTOFF ALONG
PATTERN OF HIS PREDECESSOR. AS FOR NON- FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE,
HE SAID ITALY WAS PREPARED TO SEND FOUR OR FIVE ARMY ENGINEERS
FOR ONE TO TWO YEAR ASSIGNMENTS TO ASSIST IN ORGANIZATION
OF NEW MALTESE PIONEER CORPS, AND ALSO TO PROVIDE FURTHER
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS.

12. FELICE IS UNUSUAL IN NATIONALIST PARTY IN THAT HE
HAS A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO MINTOFF AND SEES HIM QUITE
REGULARLY. HE GIVES CREDIT TO MINTOFF' S INITIATIVE AND DESIRE
TO IMPROVE ECONOMIC SITUATION ON MALTA, BUT NATURALLY
REFLECTS NATIONALIST PARTY VIEW ON SPECIFIC ISSUES. WE
SUSPECT HE IS SOMEWHAT FLATTERED BY ATTENTION MINTOFF
GIVES HIM. GETZ

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